DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 236 530 CS 007 131

AUTHOR Allen, Steve
TITLE How To Enjoy the Classics. Power of the Printed Word.
INSTITUTION International Paper Co., New York, NY.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 4p.
AVAILABLE FROM "Power of the Printed Word," International Paper Co., Dept. 7, P.O. Box 900, Elmsford, New York 10523.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Books; Guidelines; *Literature; *Literature Appreciation; *Reading Strategies
IDENTIFIERS *Classics; PF Project

ABSTRACT

A classic is a book that gives the exhilarating feeling that a part of life finally has been uncovered. It is a book that has stood the test of time, that people keep reaching for throughout the ages for its special enlightenment. Here are some suggestions to help open up the world of the classics: (1) know if what is being read is a novel, a drama, a biography, or a history; (2) don't read in bed (classics can be tough going); (3) don't be thrown by a lot of characters; (4) give the author a chance and don't give up on the book too soon; (5) read in big bites; (6) read what the author read; (7) read about the author's time; (8) read about the author's life; and (9) read the book again. The following are a few classics worth trying: Homer's "Iliad" and "Odyssey"; Rabelais's "Gargantua and Pantagruel"; Geoffrey Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales"; Cervantes's "Don Quixote"; Shakespeare's plays, especially "Hamlet," "Macbeth," and "Romeo and Juliet"; Charles Dickens's "Pickwick Papers"; and Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn." (DC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED236530

HOW TO ENJOY THE CLASSICS
POWER OF THE PRINTED WORD

by

Steve Allen

International Paper Company

1980

CS007131

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

✓ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lillian Mangs

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

How to enjoy the classics

By Steve Allen

International Paper asked Steve Allen, television comedian, composer, writer of the television series "Meeting of Minds," author of 22 books and lover of the classics, to tell how you can appreciate man's greatest written works.

Why is it? In school we learn one of the most amazing and difficult feats man has ever accomplished – *how to read* – and at the same time we learn to hate to read the things worth reading most!

It's happened to us all – with assignment reading! It happened to me. The teacher assigned *Moby Dick*. I didn't want to read it. So I fought it. I disliked it. I thought I won.

But I lost. My struggle to keep at arm's length from *Moby Dick* cost me all the good things that can come from learning to come to terms with those special few books we call the "classics."

I've come back to *Moby Dick* on my own since. I *like* it. And I've discovered a new level of pleasure from it with each reading.

What is a classic? A classic is a book that gives you that exhilarating feeling, if only for a moment, that you've finally uncovered part of the meaning of life.

A classic is a book that's stood the test of time, a book that men and women all over the world keep reaching for throughout the ages for its special enlightenment.

Not many books can survive such a test. Considering all the volumes that have been produced since man first put chisel to stone, classics account for an infinitesimal share of the total – less than .001 percent. That's just a few thousand books. Of those, under 100 make up the solid core.

Why should you tackle the classics? Why try to enjoy them?

I suggest three good reasons:

1. Classics open up your mind.
2. Classics help you grow.
3. Classics help you understand your life, your world, yourself.

That last one is the big one. A classic can give you insights into yourself that you will get nowhere else. Sure, you can get pleasure out of almost any book. But a classic, once you penetrate it, lifts you up *high*! Aeschylus's *Oresteia* was written nearly 2,500 years ago – and it still knocks me out!

But I can hear you saying, "I've *tried* reading classics. They are hard to understand. I can't get into them."

Let me offer some suggestions that will help you open up this wondrous world. Pick up a classic you've always promised to try. Then take Dr. Allen's advice.

Know what you're reading

Is it a novel, drama, biography, history? To find out, check the table of contents, read the book cover, the preface, or look up the title or author in *The Reader's Encyclopedia*.

Don't read in bed

Classics can be tough going; I'll admit it. You need to be alert, with your senses sharp. When you read in bed you're courting sleep – and you'll blame it on the book when you start nodding off.

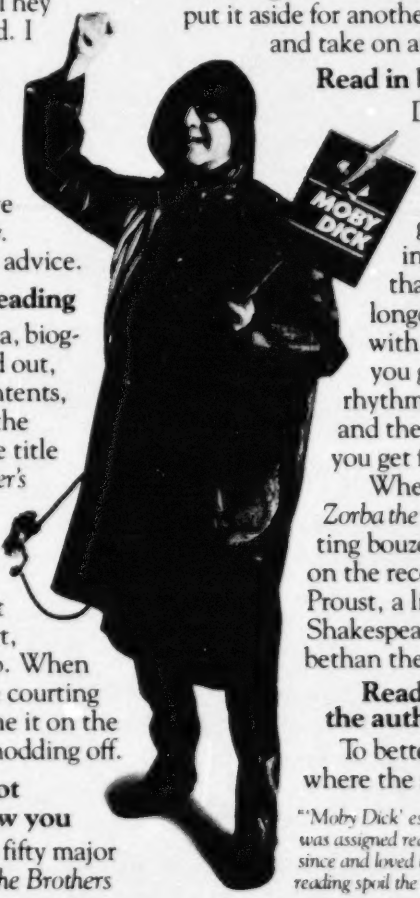
Don't let a lot of characters throw you

Dostoevsky tosses fifty major characters at you in *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the very first chapter of *War and Peace*, Tolstoy bombards you with twenty-two names – long, complicated ones like Anna Pavlovna Scherer, Anatole and Prince Bolkonski. Don't scurry for cover. Stick with it. The characters will gradually sort themselves out and you'll feel as comfortable with them as you do with your own dear friends who were strangers, too, when you met them.

Give the author a chance

Don't say "I don't get it!" too soon. Keep reading right to the end.

Sometimes, though, you may not be ready for the book you're trying to get into. I tackled Plato's *Republic* three times before it finally opened up to me. And man, was it worth it! So if you really can't make a go of the book in your lap, put it aside for another day, or year, and take on another one.



Read in big bites

Don't read in short nibbles. How can you expect to get your head into anything that way? The longer you stay with it, the more you get into the rhythm and mood – and the more pleasure you get from it.

When you read *Zorba the Greek* try putting bouzouki music on the record player; Proust, a little Debussy; Shakespeare, Elizabethan theater music.

Read what the author read

To better understand where the author is

"'Moby Dick' escaped me when it was assigned reading. I've landed it since and loved it. Don't let assigned reading spoil the classics for you."

coming from, as we say, read the books he once read and that impressed him. Shakespeare, for example, dipped into North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* for the plots of *Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* It's fun to know you're reading what *he* read.

Read about the author's time

You are the product of your time. Any author is the product of *his* time. Knowing the history of that time, the problems that he and others faced, their attitudes – will help you understand the author's point of view. *Important point:* You may not agree with the author. No problem. At least he's made you think!

Read about the author's life

The more you know about an author's own experiences, the more you'll understand why he wrote what he wrote. You'll begin to see the autobiographical odds and ends that are hidden in his work.

A writer can't help but reveal himself. Most of our surmises about Shakespeare's life come from clues found in his plays.

Read the book again

All classics bear rereading. If after you finish the book you're intrigued but still confused, reread it then and there. It'll open up some more to you.

If you did read a classic a few years back and loved it, read it again. The book will have so many new things to say to you, you'll hardly believe it's the same one.

A few classics to enjoy

You can find excellent lists of the basic classics compiled by helpful experts, like Clifton Fadiman's *Lifetime Reading Plan,* the *Harvard Classics* and Mortimer J. Adler's *Great Books.* Look into them.

But before you do, I'd like to suggest a few classics that can light up your life. Even though some might have been spoiled for you by the required reading stigma, try them. Try them. And *try* them.

1. Homer: *Iliad* and *Odyssey.* The Adam and Eve of Western literature. Read a good recent translation. My favorite is by Robert Fitzgerald.

2. Rabelais: *Gargantua and Pantagruel.* A Gargantuan romp. I recommend the Samuel Putnam translation.

"Some of my best friends come out of the pages of the classics I suggest to you here. They'll be your best friends, too, for they'll help you better understand your life, your world and yourself."

3. Geoffrey Chaucer: *Canterbury Tales.* Thirty folks on a four-day pilgrimage swapping whoppers. Don't be surprised if the people you meet here are like people you know in *your* life.

4. Cervantes: *Don Quixote.* The first modern novel, about the lovable old Don with his "impossible dream." How could you go through life without reading it *once?*

5. Shakespeare: *Plays.* Shakespeare turned out 37 plays. Some are flops, some make him the greatest writer ever. All offer gold. His best: "Hamlet," "Macbeth" and "Romeo and Juliet." (See them on the stage, too.)

6. Charles Dickens: *Pickwick Papers.* No one can breathe life into characters the way Dickens can. Especially the inimitable Samuel Pickwick, Esq.

7. Mark Twain: *Huckleberry Finn.* Maybe you had to read this in school. Well, climb back on that raft with Huck and Jim. You'll find new meaning this time.

Of course, these few suggestions hardly scratch the surface.

Don't just dip your toe into the deep waters of the classics. Plunge in! Like generations of bright human beings before you, you'll find yourself invigorated to the marrow by thoughts and observations of the most gifted writers in history.

You still enjoy looking at classic paintings. You enjoy hearing musical classics. Good books will hold you, too.

Someone has said the classics are the diary of man. Open up the diary. Read about yourself – and *understand* yourself.

Irene Wen

Years ago, International Paper sponsored a series of advertisements, "Send me a man who reads," to help make Americans more aware of the value of reading.

Today, the printed word is more vital than ever. Now there is more need than ever before for all of us to *read* better, *write* better, and *communicate* better. International Paper offers this *new* series in the hope that, even in a small way, we can help.

For reprints of this advertisement, write: "Power of the Printed Word," International Paper Co., Dept. 7 P.O. Box 900, Elmsford, New York 10523. ©1980 INTERNATIONAL PAPER COMPANY

INTERNATIONAL PAPER COMPANY

We believe in the power of the printed word.

Printed in U.S. on International Paper Company's Springhill® Offset, basis 60 lb.